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1 In her introduction to *Life as Insinuation: George Santayana's Hermeneutics of Finite Life and Human Self*, Katarzyna Kremplewska states that the general aim of her book is "reconstructing George Santayana's conception of human self as embedded in a larger project of philosophy of life" (xi). More specifically, she explains that she is undertaking an inquiry "into the latter in the context of the former" (xvi). Her aim is not only to reconstruct Santayana's conception of the self, but also show how it provides the basis for understanding a number of key ideas in his philosophy of life or what she calls "contemplative vitalism" – a fitting term intended to capture both the material and the spiritual dimensions of Santayana's philosophy (xiv). Kremplewska draws widely from the history of philosophy and the breadth of her discussions are impressive. Her book is positively teeming with ideas, but the central themes she addresses after reconstructing Santayana's conception of the self are his views about of the tragic conception of human life; his account of human freedom and flourishing; and his analysis of the self in relation to social and political life.

2 Kremplewska's study of Santayana's philosophy is hermeneutic in at least a couple of respects. First, there is her thesis that Santayana's notion of the self is not an independent substance or ego, but an entity that "emerges" via the process of interpreting the world (17). She sums up this idea with the unusual phrase contained in the title of her book, "life as insinuation," a metaphor she defines as "introducing something alien into something else, of grafting something upon something else" (97). (The metaphor is borrowed from Bergson and grafted onto Santayana.) The notions of *emerging* and *grafting* are rather different, but Kremplewska's main point appears to be that the human self in Santayana's system is a conditioned reality. Her approach is also hermeneutic in the sense that she seeks to reveal the tacit historical, psychological, and moral motivations that purportedly led Santayana to his ontological categories of the being of essence, the existence of matter, the actuality of spirit or consciousness, and the eternality of truth. For Kremplewska, "[a]ny consideration of selfhood in Santayana must take into account the fact that a naturalistic and quasi-pragmatic philosophy of action precedes and – to some extent – determines the shape of his mature ontology" (29). Whether or not Santayana's "naturalistic and quasi-pragmatic" philosophy of action precedes his mature ontology or is simply coincidental with it, so that the practical element and the ontology (in particular, matter) are two ways of describing the same thing, Kremplewska is certainly correct to highlight the pragmatic norms embedded in Santayana's ontology.

3 Kremplewska's project with its "large thematic scope" is an ambitious one (xvii). It is ambitious not only because she defends a novel account of Santayana's notion of the self (more on this below), but also because of her sustained and groundbreaking efforts of bringing Santayana into a comparative and critical conversation with a number of Continental philosophers, such as Henri Bergson, Martin Heidegger, Edmund Husserl, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Paul Ricœur, to name a few. By having us look through the lens or, better, *lenses* of Continental philosophy, Kremplewska believes Santayana's ideas about the human self are clarified and thereby more readily reconstructed.

4 The way in which Kremplewska puts Santayana into conversation with major Continental philosophers is often on their terms: phenomenological, transcendental, and with a dramatic tone (*e.g.*, Santayana's realm of matter is deemed "*the sphere of helplessness*" (197)). As a result, her reconstruction of Santayana's account of self is somewhat at odds with his classically-oriented, naturalistic views of human life and ontology. In *Scepticism and Animal Faith* (1923), Santayana dedicates a chapter to the "Belief in the Self." In that chapter he defines the self not as a "transcendental ego" or "a flux of sentience," but a "substantial being preceding all the vicissitudes of experience" (SAF 145). And in *Realms of Being* (1942), he offers a definition of "Self or Person" as a being with social and political relations that "lives in his ambitions, affections, and repute" (*Realms of Being*, 571). This last definition would seem to conform with Kremplewska's claim that the human self emerges through the processes of interpreting and being in the world. However, she does not give these chapters much attention. Instead, she begins her study with a historical overview of the notion of the self and subjectivity. While her survey of the Western philosophical history of subjectivity is extensive, the guiding thread through it is Charles Taylor's *The Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (1995). Kremplewska appears to take Taylor's historical analysis of the self to be canonic. As she sees it, Taylor sets the "problematic of selfhood in a cultural context and provides an incomparable thematic framework for

any further discussion of Santayana's eclectic heritage" (27). Her discussion of this idea is multifaceted, yet her conclusion in the chapter is a modest one, namely, that when Santayana discusses selfhood, "in the background we are dealing with a temporal, dynamic, relational being, which – let us risk a suggestion – inexplicitly exhibits some 'nature'" (28). This might be a risky suggestion for some philosophers, but it is a platitude of Santayana's naturalism, at least if by "nature" Kremplewska means some internal essences or qualities and external relations (also "essences") that are necessary for a substantial self to exist at all.

5 The strategy of appealing to Continental philosophers is one of the most interesting aspects of Kremplewska's book. This is especially so with regard to chapter five, "Coping with Finitude: Santayana Reading Heidegger." By tapping into Santayana's marginalia on *Sein und Zeit*, Kremplewska effectively shows that Santayana saw in Heidegger a philosophical ally with an Aristotelian orientation who was also deeply concerned with ontology. She further shows how Santayana struggled to square several of Heidegger's ontological terms and categories (*e.g. Dasein*, being, *ontish*) with his own terminology (*e.g.* existence, essence, animal faith). Of particular interest here are Santayana's comments on Heidegger's use of the notions of *Nothing* and *Death* (146). Seasoned philosophers are not always receptive to new ideas, but Santayana was evidently inspired, as he wrote, by Heidegger's "profound analysis" of death as a "totality of life." Santayana accepted Heidegger's insight that, as Kremplewska puts it, "[a]s long as a given life, counting as 'one fact,' is not yet framed by death, the scenario of the play of life remains underdetermined" (145). By relying on textual evidence in the form of Santayana's letters discussing Heidegger and his marginalia on Heidegger's work, Kremplewska reveals some definite affinities between the two philosophers and opens up new avenues for interpreting Santayana's philosophy, although likely not to the point, as proposed, of "rethinking [Santayana's] entire *œuvre*" (xii).

6 Although Kremplewska's hermeneutic, Continental-philosophy-oriented highlights new angles on Santayana's philosophy, it is not without its difficulties. One practical difficulty is the sheer number of passing references to various philosophers Kremplewska makes on page after page of her book. The conceptual generality of Santayana's ontological categories make it tempting to draw connections between his system and other systems of philosophy that would appear, at least on the surface, radically different (see, for example, Michael Hodges's and John Lachs's 2000 comparative study *Wittgenstein and Santayana, Thinking in Ruins: Wittgenstein and Santayana on Contingency*). However, while the multitude of references Kremplewska makes point toward interesting thematic connections that may be worthy of deeper exploration, at times it is difficult to discern the philosophy through all the philosophers. Moreover, Kremplewska's references are often highly selective, a fact she does not hide. With regard to Santayana and Heidegger, she asserts: "I approach Santayana's notes not as an evidence of similarities or of his ultimate views on Heidegger but rather as suggestions of possible affinities, which happen to confirm my previously existing ideas" (113). As indicated, the textual evidence she marshals clearly shows that Heidegger's philosophy sparked Santayana's interest. Nevertheless, her interpretations sometimes result in omissions that otherwise might round out Santayana's views. For instance, although it is true that Santayana praised some of Heidegger's ideas as being "the work of a superior mind," he also commented that Heidegger is "[n]ot so superior as Descartes, I grant: there you have a first-rate man" (*Letters of George Santayana*, MIT, 5:137). Similarly, with regard to Bergson, Kremplewska

contends that both he and Santayana "represent an untypical kind of naturalism" and that understanding Bergson's philosophy helps us better understand Santayana's (107). Yet Santayana's relationship to Bergson is more complex than Kremplewska lets on. After publishing a review of Bergson's work, Santayana expressed his misgivings in a letter. "I begin to fear on the contrary that I have taken [Bergson] too seriously," he wrote, and that "the best way of discrediting a charlatan is perhaps not to call him one" (*Letters of George Santayana*, MIT, 2:128). Kremplewska largely leaves out such criticisms and so Santayana's views on Heidegger and Bergson appear more aligned than actually they are. Such interpretive difficulties are somewhat exacerbated by the fact that while her book is nominally about Santayana's account of human life and the self, it leans more toward a comparative study of his philosophy and the ideas and concerns of major Continental philosophers, with each chapter of the book dealing with a disparate nest of ideas loosely connected to its nominal theme.

7 Santayana believed his philosophy was rooted in common sense; that is, in the everyday, instinctive convictions that govern an animal mind in the presence of nature. In a marginal comment in *Realms of Being*, he deflates any metaphysical pretentions for his system of ontology by describing it as "ordinary reflection systematized" (*Realms of Being*: 827). A bedrock of his common sense philosophy is the claim that there is one source of power in the universe: the realm of matter. Since spirit or consciousness is not a material substance, it is not a source of power. Thus, as with the realms of essence and truth, spirit for Santayana is real but causally inefficacious. It is generated by the physiological functions of the human body, or what he calls the *psyche*, yet intrinsically it is a spectator, not an actor. Kremplewska is well aware of these fundamentals of Santayana's philosophy. However, rather than a unitary account of the self where spirit is matter become conscious and the psyche is matter's physiological functions, she asserts that she is "inclined to a view that the opposition between [existence and essence] allows for a dynamic interplay or a dialectic under the condition that a third element – that of a conscious life/a psycho-spiritual unity – is introduced" (39). This additional unity is the self. "The *self* proper," she writes, "as I propose, stands for a *triadic temporal structure* of psyche-spirit-I, or, alternatively, body-psyche-spirit" (45). This "psycho-spiritual unity" with an "irreducible first-person perspective" would appear to be something over and above the human animal taken in its social and political relations, at least insofar as it has "dynamic interplay" with the realm of matter (46). If the self is some kind of emergent substance possessed with "triadic existential dynamics," then Kremplewska's reconstruction would contravene Santayana's naturalism or at least his epiphenomenalism (64). That said, it is possible that she does not intend to substantialize the self and turn it into a power. Much of what she writes works toward a reconfiguration of the concepts or "dialectic distinctions" that Santayana employs to articulate his ontology and account of the self while still respecting his view that matter is the only substantial reality or source of power. If this is her position, then her reconstruction of Santayana's *triadic* account of the self would still be novel, but it would not contravene his naturalism.

8 The last chapter of Kremplewska's book, "Beyond the Self (into the Political Realm)," with its subtitle "The Essential Negativity of Human Being and Rational (Self-)Government," takes up ideas some of which concern the self directly, such as the material basis of the self in politics, while other ideas address more generally Santayana's views on political freedom and his critique of 19th early 20th century liberalism. In this short, dense chapter there are passages where she appears to sum up

Santayana's political philosophy neatly and accurately, such as when she writes that: "Freedom in Santayana's writings often stands for a harmonious relation between the self and necessity. Thus, it is closely related to self-rule, vital liberty, and rationality" (198). Other claims she makes seem antithetical to Santayana's view for rational government, for example, when she asserts that the "ideal aim of successful self-government... [according to Santayana] is fully achievable – if at all – only for someone who has learned to transcend worldly concerns and dwell the realm of spirit" (206). This last claim conflates Santayana's account of the spiritual life with his account of the life of reason in politics. The two might go together or they might not; in Santayana's philosophy they are separable. Kremplewska's interpretation of what Santayana means by a political *domination* and a *power* is also uncertain. For Santayana, the distinction is moral and not material, but Kremplewska calls them "active vectors in the field of forces," which suggest the distinction is material (199). She might be led away from Santayana's meaning since she appears to cast doubt on his moral relativism, an axiom in Santayana's philosophy, but which is characterized as "the alleged moral relativism ascribed by some critics of Santayana" (210).

9 I suspect that for many readers the picture of Santayana's philosophy in Kremplewska's book will seem unfamiliar. His system, intended to clarify common sense, is found to be riddled with "inescapable aporias" (41). His naturalism, set out in *Realms of Being* and that reaches back to the writings of Democritus, Epicurus, and Lucretius, is characterized (indirectly) as the views of "a thinker encaged in a glass house of his own philosophical idiosyncrasies, radicalized by a growing mystical bent" (xiii). And Kremplewska's triadic account of Santayana's notion of the self appears to run counter to Santayana's unitary substantial self. These differences in interpretation aside, Kremplewska presents Santayana's philosophy in a spectrum of new light and challenges those familiar with his writings to reexamine many aspects of his philosophy. And if one is looking for a through-line from Santayana's philosophy to the works of many leading Continental philosophers, Kremplewska's book is the place to start.

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